



NEWS BULLETIN

Plants and Pollution

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Wildfires: Nature's Contribution to pollution

CSIR-NATIONAL BOTANICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE, LUCKNOW

Recent Australian wildfires made worse by logging

Science Daily, 05 May 2020

In the wake of the country's worst forest fires in recorded history, University of Queensland researchers have been part of an international collaboration, investigating Australia's historical and contemporary land-use.

UQ Professor and Wildlife Conservation Society Director James Watson said logging regimes have made many forests more fire prone for a host of reasons.

"Logging causes a rise in fuel loads, increases potential drying of wet forests and causes a decrease in forest height," Professor Watson said.

"It can leave up to 450 tonnes of combustible fuel per hectare close to the ground -- by any measure, that's an incredibly dangerous level of combustible material in seasonally dry landscapes.

"By allowing these practices to increase fire severity and flammability, we undermine the safety of some of our rural communities.

"It affects wildlife too by creating habitat loss, fragmentation and disturbance for many species, with major negative effects on forest wildlife."

Lead author, Australian National University's Professor David Lindenmayer, said there are land management actions we can take to stop these fires from occurring in the future.

"The first is to prevent logging of moist forests, particularly those close to urban areas," Professor Lindenmayer said.

"We must also reduce forest fragmentation by proactively restoring some previously logged forests.

"In the event of wildfires, land managers must avoid practices such as 'salvage' logging -- or logging of burnt forests -- which severely reduces recovery of a forest."

The Federal Government has launched a Royal Commission to find ways to improve Australia's preparedness, resilience, and response to natural disasters.

Researcher Michelle Ward, from UQ's School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, said it was time for government to act.

"We urge policy makers to,....."

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Amazon fires may be worse in 2020 as deforestation and land grabbing spikes

Mongabay, 18 May 2020

It's too early for a verdict, but at present, threats to the Brazilian Amazon are growing virtually unchecked while the COVID-19 pandemic deepens. As the virus spreads, creating dramatic scenes in the rainforest, land grabbing is advancing and there is no sign of deforestation slowing. On the contrary: numbers skyrocketed during the first quarter of 2020.

The National Institute for Space Research (INPE) reported that 796 square kilometers (307 square miles) of forest were cut down during the first three months of this year. A third of the devastation happened on including national forests and conservation areas, which in general have become targets for land grabbers eager for big profits. According to the Institute, reports of deforestation were up 51% between January and March as compared to 2019.

Aside from loss of forest, potentially dangerous drought is possible this year: in the first three months of 2020, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric administration (NOAA) noted that temperatures in the Amazon rainforest were far above the expected average for the season. NASA measurements also suggest that the groundwater in large areas of the Amazon is at lower levels than normal. In addition, the forest has had a drier rainy season than normal.

As a result of all these factors, researchers interviewed by Mongabay are expressing grave concern about the coming dry season and Amazon fire season. Beginning in May, the trees cut in previous months will need to be burned by land grabbers and others to clear the land. Illegal burning will then begin to spread, a process that normally begins in northern states like Roraima.

"What is frightening is that, even during the rainy season, we saw a big jump [in deforestation]. Those who occupy land and....."

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This Year's Forest Fire Season Could Be Even Deadlier

Human Rights Watch (HRW), 20 May 2020

The world's forests could soon join the growing list of casualties of the coronavirus pandemic. The fire season is approaching for many. And governments grappling with Covid-19 are rolling back enforcement of environmental protections that are crucial for containing the fires.

Covid-19 makes the effort to reduce forest fires more urgent, not less. This is especially the case as those who are most affected by smoke from the fires – older people, and people with pre-existing heart and lung diseases – are also at higher risk if they contract the virus.

Recognizing how air pollution caused by smoke may increase vulnerability to Covid-19, British Columbia's Environment Ministry recently banned open burning of vegetative debris in areas at high-risk for wildfires. The Canadian province acted on a recommendation from its Center for Disease Control to reduce excess air pollution. In the US, the state of Colorado took similar measures to protect residents.

But they are the exception. In Brazil, most fires in the Amazon rainforest are intentionally set, often on illegally cleared land, chiefly between June and October. President Jair Bolsonaro's efforts to weaken environmental enforcement have led to a dramatic increase in deforestation, and last year's fires concentrated along these newly razed areas, scientists from NASA and the Brazilian space agency concluded. Environmental enforcement has continued to drop during the pandemic, with preliminary estimates of forest loss up by 50 per cent in 2020 compared with last year, according to government data.

In Indonesia, rather than relaxing enforcement, the authorities have scrapped regulations that keep illegal logging in check altogether. As of May, exporters will no longer need to obtain licenses verifying that their timber and wood products come from legal sources. The trade minister justified the move as part of a stimulus to boost the timber industry amid the economic slowdown caused by the Covid-19 outbreak.....

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Around 4,000 wildfire alerts across country in past 7 days

The Times of India, 26 May 2020

Dehradun: The Forest Survey of India (FSI) has sent out around 4,000 fire alerts across the country in the past one week

through both satellites MODIS and SNPP-VIIRS. The FSI data, accessed by TOI, indicates that in the past one week, from May 18 to May 25, 3,971 fire alerts have been sent out to all the states.

Of the 3,971 alerts, the maximum 746 were from Chhattisgarh, followed by 618 from Madhya Pradesh, 438 from Maharashtra, 422 from Andhra Pradesh and 410 from Telangana.

The Director General (DG) of Forest Survey of India (FSI), Subhash Ashutosh, attributed the high number of forest fires to the

rising temperatures. He said, "Due to intermittent rains and good moisture on the forest floor, wildfires are lesser this year. But

with the rising mercury, more forest fires are likely in the coming days. For Central India next one month is going to be crucial

given IMD's alert regarding the heat wave condition."

Incidentally, the same week in 2019 recorded 6,500 fire alerts from across the country. This year, the number has been 38%

less due to intermittent rainfall.

The situation in Uttarakhand, which boasts of over 70% forest cover, is also better than the last year.

BK Gangtey, chief conservator of forests & state nodal officer (forest fire) of the forest department, said that in the past one

week, the state has recorded only 15 fire alerts. He said, "Since February this year, the state has reported 55 incidents of forest

fire, in which around 71.46 hectares of forest cover was gutted compared.....

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